

Introduction to Literary Analysis
ENGL 3000.002
T/Th 12:30-1:50 / Lang 311
Spring 2026

Dr. Richard Joines
Office / Hours: Lang 407b
T/Th 8-9 (by appointment)

I think we ought to read only books that bite and sting us. If the book doesn't shake us awake like a blow to the skull, why bother reading it? So it can make us happy? Good God, we'd be just as happy if we had no books at all.... What we need are books that hit us like a most painful misfortune, like the death of someone we loved more than we love ourselves, that make us feel as though we've been banished to the woods, far from any human presence. A book must be the ax for the frozen sea within us.

—Franz Kafka

I don't read a novel for the story. I read it for the sensibility of the author, what his obsessions are, what he's fantasizing about, why this character speaks to him, why he devotes a novel to this character... and you either like it, or you don't.

—Bret Easton Ellis

I always thought I aspired to that engagé tradition, but Sartre's conception of the novel was not a model for me. I find Céline, his foe, much more attractive as a writer in his disregard for an obligation to the common good and for his searing high style. I prefer to read the despicable stylists, but I am not like them in the most crucial of ways. I love people instead of hate them. I care about struggle. Yet I also sort of detest the idea of moral fiction.

—Rachel Kushner

I like writing disagreeable poems or certainly don't mind if a poem strikes someone as unpleasant. It is possible to offend people still, and my poems not infrequently do. One way to do it is to write beautifully what people don't want to hear. . . . I like poems that are daggers that sing, that for all the power of the sentiments expressed, and all the power to upset and offend, are so well made that they're achieved things. However much they upset you, they also affect you.

—Frederick Seidel

Course Description

Like all other arts, the Science of Deduction and Analysis is one which can only be acquired by long and patient study nor is life long enough to allow any mortal to attain the highest possible perfection in it. Before turning to those moral and mental aspects of the matter which present the greatest difficulties, let the enquirer begin by mastering more elementary problems.

—Arthur Conan Doyle

ENGL 3000: Introduction to Literary Analysis is the “gateway course” for English majors (typically as juniors) where they fortify their scholarly competence at handling the tropes and genre conventions of drama, poetry, and fiction. Mastering literary-critical vocabulary is an essential skill for close readers of texts who aim to compose academic interpretations and theoretically informed critiques of literary works of art that engage with the history of the discourse of literary studies instead of offering mere personal opinions about one's personal taste or moral preferences. In this course, you will continue your initiation into the discursive tribe of literary critics.



Ottessa Moshfegh

Required Texts (hard copies/no screens)*

Ottessa Moshfegh, *My Year of Rest & Relaxation*

Sylvia Plath, *Ariel*

Louise Glück, *Ararat*

Sharon Olds, *The Father*

Edward Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

Mari Ruti, *The Singularity of Being*

****Caveat Emptor* (buyer beware): A Kind of Trigger Warning for the Era of Cancel Culture**

No question, issue, or topic is off limits to classroom discussion so long as it is the object of academic rather than political or ideological attention.

—Stanley Fish, *Save the World on Your Own Time*

Since a wise man can be mistaken, and a hundred men, and many nations, yes, and human nature according to us is mistaken for many centuries about this or that, what assurance have we that sometimes it stops being mistaken, and that in this century it is not making a mistake?

—Montaigne, “Apology for Raymond Sebond” (1580)

It's impossible to offend someone who doesn't want to be offended.

—Friedrich Schlegel (c. 1798)

Literature explores all kinds of marvelous, heroic, altruistic, angelic, villainous, strange, outrageous, *outré*, decadent, louche, illegal, immoral, unethical, and disturbing things about human beings. Nothing is forbidden in art; all things are permitted. “Acceptable” terms, definitions, categories, slang, concepts, tastes, biases, opinions about what is harmful or offensive or relatable, morals and social mores, and so on, nearly *ad infinitum*, get debated, renegotiated, and redefined. Paradigms shift in art as in science. Literary intellectuals understand that certain things acceptable to some (in some eras) are not to others (in other eras), and that’s just the way it is—and that’s how *we* like it. We understand that *an instance* of discrimination or

a *description* of prejudice or of something “harmful” in an imaginative work of art is not itself an *act* of violence—it is (or may be) an accusation or an exposé or a specimen provided by an ally that we can examine in the safe “laboratory” space of literary discussion. No one *makes* anyone read anything they’d prefer not to, and hardly anyone is awaiting our “hot take” on this probably-not-really-all-that-pressing-matter. We literary critics accompany authors as they explore the complex nature of themselves and of other humans engaged in the conflicts and inequities in both fictional and real worlds. We do not “cancel” something or someone from the past or the present if they do not happen to take our currently fashionable politically correct stand on the social concerns deemed most crucial this week.

Free people make free choices about their individual activities, values, inclinations, lifestyles, beliefs, the books they read, and the classes they take. They have a right to those, and we value their rights and our own right to disagree or choose differently. Some of our literary texts may contain potentially triggering material to some. There is no way to know, in advance, what triggers whom. It is your responsibility, as one voluntarily enrolled in this class, to preview all material assigned. If you choose to be enrolled in *this* class, you are expected to complete **these** assigned readings and engage in scholarly discussion and exams about **them**. If you’re not comfortable with that, there are multiple sections of ENGL 3000 offered this semester (and every semester) with different teachers and readings you may find more suitable.

Part of becoming educated citizens of a democracy is learning strategies to negotiate a plurality of uncomfortable or irreconcilable views. We are all bound to have problems with certain works of literature—and certain people or their ideologies or beliefs—for a variety of reasons, but all our classroom discussions need to suit the occasion: this is an upper-level college class in a secular public university meant to **train English majors in scholarly ways of analyzing literary texts and genre conventions**. None of us are here—in this classroom—to take a political stand for or against anything. We’re here to understand more about the art of literature than we did before by reading things we’ve likely not already read, or reading them in new ways. Before arriving at a judgment or committing to an interpretation, a reaction, or taking a stand on the-hill-you’re-prepared-to-die-on, consider, instead, being cosmopolitan, urbane, and diplomatic. Ask pertinent intellectual, contextual, historical questions of yourself, the text, your teacher, and your classmates. Emotional reaction is not scholarly engagement. Being offended may be normal, but it is not an appropriate intellectual response in an academic setting. Remaining enrolled in this class means you’ve agreed to abide by this syllabus, do the work assigned, maintain a scholarly perspective, and be a civil member of this academic community.

This Instructor’s Responsibilities

I aim to follow Stanley Fish’s advice in *Save the World on Your Own Time*: the job of someone teaching in a university is to

- (1) introduce students to bodies of knowledge and traditions of inquiry they didn’t know much about before; and
- (2) equip those same students with the analytical skills that will enable them to move confidently within those traditions and to engage in independent research should they choose to do so. Teachers should show up for their classes, prepare lesson plans, *teach what has been advertised*, be current in the literature of the field,

promptly correct assignments and papers, hold regular office hours, and give academic (not political or moral) advice. . . . That’s it, there’s nothing else, and nothing more.

A university, for Fish, is a place for teaching and research, not advocacy for social issues:

The unfettered expression of ideas is a cornerstone of liberal democracy; it is a prime political value. It is *not*, however, an academic value, and if we come to regard it as our primary responsibility, we will default on the responsibilities assigned us and come to be *what no one pays us to be*—political agents engaged in political advocacy. The only advocacy that should go on in the classroom is *the advocacy of intellectual virtues*.

Should controversial issues arise in our class, realize they do so in “an academic context.” They should be discussed in “academic terms” as “objects of analysis, comparison, historical placement, etc.” and judged “on craftsmanship and coherence . . . *is it well made? does it hang together?*” That is, we should always “*academicize*”: “an academicized classroom,” Fish claims, should pursue and practice “intellectual virtues.” “Opinion-sharing sessions,” he says, “are like junk food: they fill you up with starch and leave you feeling both sated and hungry. A sustained inquiry into the truth of a matter is an almost athletic experience; it may exhaust you, but it also improves you.”



Sylvia Plath

Artificial Intelligence: It Is Absolutely Forbidden!

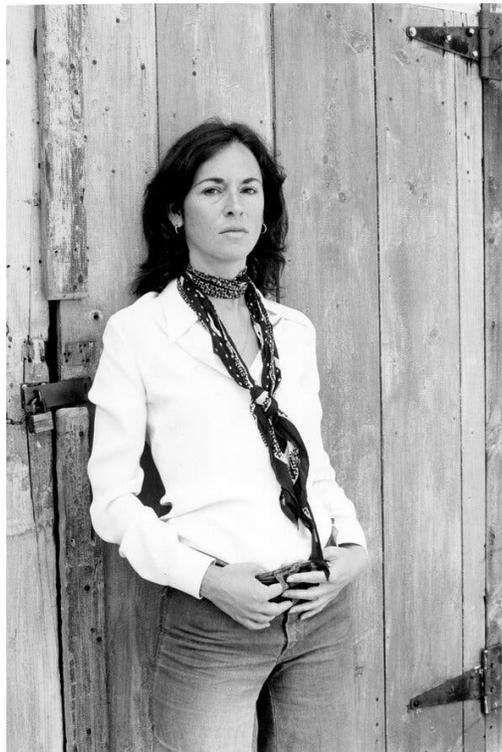
We suffer ourselves to lean and rely so strongly upon the arm of another that we destroy our own strength and vigor.
—Montaigne, “Of Pedantry”

UNT Honor Code (<https://vpaa.unt.edu/ss/integrity>)

Use of AI to write, edit, interpret, get notes from, or revise is plagiarism (“the practice of taking someone else’s work or ideas and passing them off as one’s own”). It is cheating, unauthorized assistance, and academic misconduct that violates the. You may get points deducted, fail an assignment, fail the course, and/or have your academic dishonesty violation referred to the Academic Integrity Office.

Assignments and Grades

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| In-Class Genre Exams (3 @ 10 points each) | 30 points |
| In-Class Analysis Exams (3 @ 15 points each) | 45 points |
| Attendance | 15 points |
| <u>Participation</u> | <u>10 points</u> |
| Total | 100 points |



Louise Glück

Genre Literary Terms Exams (3 @ 10 points each = 30 points)

You will sit for three in-class genre exams, fiction, poetry and drama. These will test your knowledge of literary terms and concepts and your abilities to connect those to our literary texts. **You will write these in provided blue books. You must be present to take the exam. “Make-up” exams will only be allowed for extraordinary extenuating circumstances.**

In-Class Literary Analysis Exam Essays (3 @ 15 points each = 45 points)

You will sit for three in-class analysis essays—explications, one for each genre: fiction, poetry, and drama. To “explicate” means to unfold, unfurl, or uncoil—as a flower opens, petal by petal. It is to explore how a literary text develops, or evolves—how its meanings, its words, lines, and tropes make the whole more than the sum of the parts. When one explicates, one explains, makes clear(er), discloses—that is: analyzes and interprets. An explication is a careful, slow, close reading that pays intimate attention to the elements of a text. It uses objective, formal details as primary evidence to explain possibilities of *what* and *why* and *how* the text means. In your

explications, you will display your skill as a close reader of the genre conventions of literary works of art and your abilities to use “theory” (via Mari Ruti’s *Singularity of Being*) to analyze a text. You will be provided with a poem or passage from our texts. **You will write these in blue books. You must be present to take the exam. “Make-up” exams will only be allowed for extraordinary extenuating circumstances.**



Sharon Olds

Attendance (Make-Up Work, & Being Tardy): 15 Points

Please discuss any **ODA accommodations** (and provide ODA documents) with the professor ASAP > <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access> <.

UNT Attendance Policy: <https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-039>

The first point of contact for all students should be the professor. Absences that do not fall under Title IX, Required Military Service, and Official University Functions, are deemed a matter between the student and their faculty member. If the absence is due to an extenuating circumstance that exceeds 5 consecutive days, the faculty member may request the student provide documentation through the Dean of Students’ office.

An absence will be excused by the university for:

- religious holy day, including travel for that purpose
- participation in an official university function
- required military service, including travel for that purpose
- pregnancy and parenting under Title IX

A student is responsible for requesting—ASAP—an excused absence in writing:

1. Deliver the request personally to the professor
2. Provide satisfactory evidence to substantiate the request for an excused absence.
3. Request make-up work for the day/s missed, complete it, and submit it

A student will not be penalized for a university-excused absence if make-up work is submitted. Students will be allowed, when practicable, to complete make-up work or an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable period after the absence. This may involve out-of-class time.

Your professor *may or may not* excuse other absences due to short-term illness or other extenuating circumstances. Having a note does not excuse an absence. Promptly send your professor an email explaining the reason for your absence within 24 hours. Be honest and clear (but you do not have to provide personal details).

Earning Attendance Points: 1) show up on time for and attend every class; 2) there is no #2. You are allowed 2 “free” absences in this class. Do **not** think of them as “skip days” that you get in addition to other days missed for “extenuating circumstances.” **You may have unplanned “extenuating circumstances.” If you’ve skipped and then also had “extenuating circumstances,” you don’t get to double dip.** After your two “free” absences, **3.5 points each** will be **deducted** for **unexcused absences 4, 5, 6, and 7.** A student missing **more than 7 classes** will need to meet with the professor and may **fail** the course due to absence or **face further point deductions.** If the student is allowed to remain in the course with the hope of passing, the final grade will be no higher than a “C.” Unexcused absences cannot be “made up.”

Things that are **not** excused as “extenuating” include things such as:

- “I feel/felt sick”
- “I just couldn’t get out of bed”
- “Traffic”
- “Bus was late”
- “I have scheduled a non-emergency doctor/dentist/etc. appointment”
- “I have an appointment with my advisor”
- And anything else that could be scheduled for a time other than class time

Tardiness: Roll is called when class begins. A student 10-20 minutes late will be counted tardy. Two tardies = one unexcused absence. A student more than 20 minutes late to class may be counted absent.

Make-Up Work: Students with an **excusable absence** will be permitted to **make up missed work** when practicable or may be given special consideration so they are not penalized. A student is **responsible for requesting, in writing, that an absence be excused, providing satisfactory evidence to the faculty member to substantiate the claim, and delivering the request personally to the faculty member.** When an absence is excused, the faculty member will provide a reasonable time after the absence for the student to complete an assignment. A student who completes a make-up assignment **within a reasonable period** after the absence will

not be penalized. A student needing assistance verifying absences due to any circumstances listed above should contact the Dean of Students office. The faculty member may take appropriate action if a student fails to provide proper evidence or satisfactorily complete an assignment within a reasonable time. **ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS CONTACT YOUR TEACHERS ASAP: WE CAN ONLY HELP YOU IF WE KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON.**



Edward Albee

Participation: 10 Points

Contradictions of judgments neither offend nor alter. They only rouse and exercise me. We evade correction. We ought to offer and present ourselves to it, especially when it appears in the form of conversation, and not of authority. At every opposition, we do not consider whether or not it is dust, but, right or wrong, and how to disengage ourselves. Instead of extending our arms, we thrust out our claws. I could suffer myself to be rudely handled by my friend, so much as to tell me that I am a fool and talk of I know not of what. I love stout expressions among friends and for them to speak as they think. We must fortify and harden our hearing against this tenderness of the ceremonious sound of words. I love a strong familiarity and conversation, a friendship that pleases itself in the sharpness and vigor of its communication, like love in biting and scratching.

—Montaigne, “On the Art of Discussion”

To earn participation points, a student must be present (on time) **and** regularly active in class discussions. Engaged participation involves several to-do’s and do-not’s:

- ✓ Be a decent human being.
- ✓ Show up having done your homework, prepared to
- ✓ Listen, but also to
- ✓ Voluntarily ask questions and pose problems so you’re
- ✓ Actively participating in and contributing to discussions of the readings
- ✓ And thoughtfully responding to other students’ ideas
- ✓ In focused ways that build on what we’ve been learning,

- ✓ Advancing our conversation, so there is coherence to our semester.
- ✓ Be bold; be memorable; take risks.
- ✓ Understand that not everyone thinks like you, and that's OK.
- ✓ Treat your classmates, your teacher, these texts, and this class with respect.
- ✓ Take yourself and your education seriously: all our futures depend on it.
- ✓ Do not dominate discussion, ramble or belittle others' contributions.
- ✓ Do not consume media on your phone or laptop: NO SCREENS.
- ✓ Do not do work for other classes in our class time.
- ✓ Do not interrupt others or disrupt class by being tardy or coming-and-going during class.
- ✓ Do not sit there as if before a blanked Zoom screen or as if you're here under protest: you've signed up for the show—enjoy it!

Schedule

Week 1

T 1/13—Syllabus & A Petit Introduction to Lacanian Theory

Th 1/15—Moshfegh, *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*: Chapters 1-2

Week 2

T 1/20—Ruti, *The Singularity of Being*, Introduction & Part 1, Chapter 1

Th 1/22—Moshfegh, *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*: Chapters 3-5 + Literary Terms: Fiction

Week 3

T 1/27—Ruti, *The Singularity of Being*, Part 1, Chapters 2-3

Th 1/29—Moshfegh, *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*: Chapters 5-8 + Literary Terms: Fiction

Week 4

T 2/3—Ruti, *The Singularity of Being*, Part 1, Chapter 4

Th 2/5—In-Class Fiction Exam: Literary Terms

Week 5

T 2/10—In-Class Fiction Exam Essay: Literary Analysis

Th 2/12—Plath, *Ariel* + Literary Terms: Poetry

Week 6

T 2/17—Ruti, *The Singularity of Being*, Part 2, Chapter 5

Th 2/19—Plath, *Ariel* + Literary Terms: Poetry

Week 7

T 2/24—Plath, *Ariel* + Literary Terms: Poetry

Th 2/26—Ruti, *The Singularity of Being*, Part 2, Chapter 6

Week 8

T 3/3 —Gluck, *Ararat* + Literary Terms: Poetry

Th 3/5—Gluck, *Ararat* + Literary Terms: Poetry

Week 9

T 3/10—Spring Break

Th 3/12—Spring Break

Week 10

T 3/17—Gluck, *Ararat* + Literary Terms: Poetry

Th 3/19—Olds, *The Father* + Literary Terms: Poetry

Week 11

T 3/24 —Olds, *The Father* + Literary Terms: Poetry

Th 3/26—Olds, *The Father* + Literary Terms: Poetry

Week 12

T 3/31—In-Class Poetry Exam: Literary Terms

Th 4/2—In-Class Poetry Exam Essay: Literary Analysis

Week 13

T 4/7—Ruti, *The Singularity of Being*, Part 2, Chapter 7

Th 4/9—Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* + Literary Terms: Drama

Week 14

T 4/14—Ruti, *The Singularity of Being*, Part 2, Chapter 8 & Conclusion

Th 4/16—Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* + Literary Terms: Drama

Week 15

T 4/21—Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* + Literary Terms: Drama

Th 4/23—Screening: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*

Week 16

T 4/28—Screening: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*

Th 4/30—Screening: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*

Exam Week

T 5/5—In-Class Drama Essay Exam: Literary Terms + Literary Analysis

Th 5/7